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SUBJECT: IOM AND GOVERNMENT OF MOROCCO HOLD JOINT
CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION AND RELIGION

¶1. (U) This cable is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶2. (U) Marking International Migrants Day, December 18, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) released a statement saying, "More attention should be paid by the international community to the large numbers of migrants stranded far from their homes and in need of assistance and protection." These sentiments were closely echoed earlier this month at a conference organized by IOM and the Moroccan Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Living Abroad. The conference, held on December 5-6, entitled "Migration and Religion in a Globalized World", drew participants from over 40 countries and formally addressed such topics as, the role of religion in the migratory process, the role of the media, and the sensitization of youth to religious tolerance. Informally, however, many of the speakers tied their presentations to terrorism often linked to immigrants and the perceptions and misperceptions of Islam in the West.

Opening Remarks Address Concerns of Terrorism

¶3. (U) Prime Minister Driss Jettou opened the conference by reaffirming Morocco's commitment to its international obligation to preserve the identity and rights of migrants. Morocco has a long history of supporting diversity, said Jettou, and will continue to do so. The PM, however, very quickly zeroed in on the challenges many countries, and Morocco in particular, are facing regarding clandestine migration and its links to organized crime, as well as the problem of international terrorism unreasonably veiled under

the cover of religion.

14. (U) The injustice of the perceived linking of Islam and terrorism in the West was a sentiment that was seconded by another of the opening speakers, Nezha Chekrouni, Minister Delegate in Charge of Moroccans Living Abroad, who was the motivating force behind the conference. The Minister reminded listeners that Arabs too are victims of terrorism and that terrorism by its very nature can not be Islamic. Her strongest point, however, was hammered home when she relayed her belief that xenophobia will greatly hinder the forward march of democracy and only democracy will put an end to terrorism.

Calls for Tolerance and Respect

15. (SBU) The speakers were unanimous in their desire to see the international community adopt an approach to migration based on tolerance and respect. Panels addressed what they see as a desperate need for education on religious tolerance and highlighted the necessity to concentrate on the younger generations from both the sending and the host country communities. Many panel members called on Governments in both host and originating countries to step in and lead the way. According to the Senegalese Minister of Senegalese Abroad "Western youth should be educated on Islam and in return there should be no fear of the West here."

16. (SBU) The role of the media was emphasized as well, underscoring the influential and crucial function it plays. The consensus was that the media can act as a bridge or a chasm between immigrants and their new country influencing public opinion on migration and religion. One participant, an official from Algerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, denounced Western media blaming it for the demonization of Islam after the attacks in Spain and London, as well as on CONFERENCE ON MIGRATION AND RELIGION

the World Trade Center. The media, he claimed, is creating an atmosphere of prejudice and intolerance in the West. While another panelist pointed to the beneficial ties the media has helped to create, linking immigrants to their home countries via satellite broadcasts and internet media access.

Eating Couscous in Amsterdam

17. (U) While many of the participants spoke from a strictly eastern or western perspective two panelists presented a unique viewpoint reserved for those with a foothold in each world. Mohamed Baba, a Dutch-Moroccan partner in Mex-it, Advisors on Intercultural Management and Fatima Elatik, a Dutch-Moroccan, Vice-Governor of the district of Zeeburg in Amsterdam, spoke of their experiences as second generation Muslims living in Europe. According to Baba the way to see successful integration of immigrants, and consequently lessen the threat of extremism, is to concentrate on better housing, education, and jobs. Additionally, new stiffer security measures, he claims, are hardening the society and forcing people to adopt negative attitudes towards new immigrants, hindering integration. Elatik, an outspoken woman sporting a headscarf fashionably knotted behind her neck, spoke plainly about the problem of migrants in Europe as a problem of integration not a problem of Islam. After three generations of citizenship, she stated, "people like me are still called immigrants and that has to stop." Muslims in Europe, in her opinion, are struggling to find their identity and that may be part of what is leading some to the threshold of extremism. Acceptance and integration, she advised, are the only answers.

No Easy Task

18. (U) Minister Delegate Chekrouni closed the conference by reminding the participants that, for most immigrants, reconciling their principles and values with those of their host countries is not an easy task. It is, however, vital that all immigrants respect the laws in force in their host countries. She wrapped up by reminding everyone that the objective of the conference was to create a space for dialogue on the issue and stressed the idea that "the adversary that we should face is extremism."

Comment

19. (SBU) The goal of the conference in opening up a dialogue to explore the link between religion and migration in order to help governments form policies was well served and Minister Delegate Chekrouni is to be congratulated for her role in organizing the conference. However, sadly lacking from the discussion was any mention, beyond the opening remarks of PM Jettou, of the challenges faced by countries, like Morocco, who are not only originating but destination countries for migrants. While rightly demanding that its citizens abroad are treated justly, Morocco must demonstrate to the international community its respect for those who cross its borders in search of a better way of life. GREENE